

**STATEMENT OF**  
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**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR**

**BEFORE THE**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**  
**COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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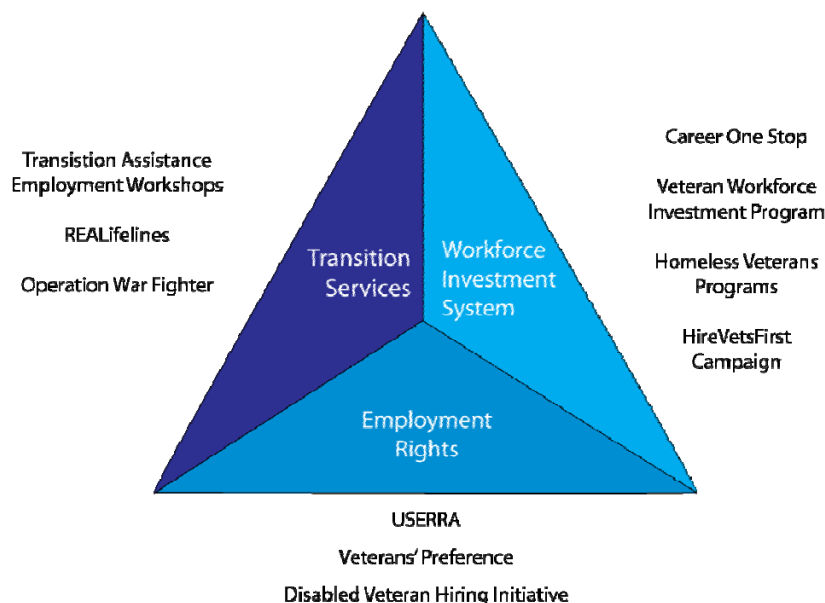
Madam Chairwoman and distinguished members of the subcommittee:

I am pleased to appear before you today to give you an overview of the programs administered by the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS).

VETS has 240 full time federal staff, the majority of which are deployed in the states. We deliver our programs and services to the states, including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, through six Regional Administrators and 52 State Directors.

Our principal programs and services focus on three areas:

- Employment assistance for veterans in America's publicly funded Workforce Investment System (One Stop Career Services)
- Employment assistance for separating military members
- Protecting service members' employment rights



## **THE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT SYSTEM**

Employment assistance for veterans through the workforce investment system is accomplished through four programs: One Stop Career Services, Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program Grants, Veterans Workforce Investment Program Grants, and the HireVetsFirst Campaign.

**One Stop Career Services** are provided through the Jobs for Veterans Act State Grants. These are formula based grants awarded on an annual basis to the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. These grants provide funding to support Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER) and Disabled Veteran Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists located in over 3,200 One Stop Career Centers throughout the country.

These veteran employment specialists help veterans find good jobs, they conduct employer outreach, and they facilitate transition assistance workshops in the continental United States. The specialists also help veterans navigate the public workforce investment system and connect veterans to an array of workforce preparation—including training—services available at the One Stop Career Centers. In accordance with the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002 (JVA), Public Law 107-288, we ensure that veterans accessing services in the One Stop Career Centers receive priority of service.

The difference between duties of the veteran employment specialists is that DVOPs provide outreach services and intensive employment services to meet the employment needs of eligible veterans, with priority to disabled veterans and special emphasis placed on those veterans most in need. LVERs conduct outreach to local employers to develop employment opportunities for veterans, and facilitate employment, training and placement services to veterans. In particular, many LVERs are the facilitators for the Transition Assistance Program employment workshops.

The JVA, as amended, gave the states flexibility to employ full- or half-time DVOP and LVER staff as the state determines necessary to carry out their veteran services plans. The JVA also changed the funding formula. The funding now made available is based upon the total number of veterans residing in the state that are seeking employment as a ratio of the total number of veterans seeking employment in all states, taking into consideration civilian labor force data.

In support of these DVOP/LVER positions, VETS will continue to provide an operational framework to facilitate the optimum delivery of services to assist states in their mission of leading veterans toward appropriate employment.

The FY 2008 request for State Grants is \$161,894,000. This level of funding is expected to support 2,100 DVOP and LVER positions. We anticipate that this program will serve nearly 700,000 participants.

The Jobs for Veterans State Grant program received the second highest rating (moderately effective) based on the Administration's Program Assessment Rating Tool

(PART) review in FY 2005. Two of the PART recommendations call for performance management improvements, which have been implemented for PY 2006 and will continue to be refined in future years. The third PART recommendation calls for an independent evaluation, which is in progress and will be completed by the end of FY 2007. Since the program was restructured in FY 2003 by the Jobs for Veterans Act, this program has exceeded our national goals.

During Program Year (PY) 2004, which ended on June 30, 2005, the Entered Employment Rate was 60% for veterans (exceeded goal by 2%) and 56% for disabled veterans (exceeded goal by 2%). At the end of PY 2005, outcomes for veterans and disabled veterans showed an increase of 1% for all veterans and maintained the same rate for disabled veterans.

**Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E).** Since much of the interface with the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) service is through the workforce investment system, at this point I would like to briefly discuss that relationship. VR&E and VETS continue to work in partnership, along with State Workforce Agencies (SWAs), on behalf of VR&E job ready veterans who are referred to and registered with the State Workforce Agencies for intensive employment services.

Our partnership to increase the employment opportunities and placement in suitable employment of service-disabled Chapter 31 veterans is defined in a formal Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), and the results continue to improve. That positive working relationship has also carried over into other initiatives and strengthened cooperation and coordination with VETS' state partners.

Of particular note is the establishment of three working groups under the MOA. The goal of each work group is to improve the quality of employment services and suitable job placements for veterans with disabilities enrolled in the VR&E program. Each work group has an established list of roles and responsibilities directing their efforts. The work groups are:

- Performance Measures for Assessment of Partnership Program Results
- National Veterans' Training Institute (NVTI): Curriculum Design
- Joint Data Collection, Analysis, and Reports

**Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP)** is a competitive grant program. Grants are awarded to states or other public entities and non-profits, including faith-based organizations, to operate employment programs that reach out to homeless veterans and help them become gainfully employed.

The purpose of the HVRP is to provide services to assist in reintegrating homeless veterans into meaningful employment within the labor force and to stimulate the development of effective service delivery systems that will address the complex problems facing veterans. HVRP is the only nationwide program focused on assisting homeless veterans to reintegrate into the workforce.

VETS is requesting a total of \$23,620,000 for this activity in FY 2008, an increase of \$1,840,000 over FY 2007, enabling 15,095 homeless veterans to participate.

The HVRP program is a highly successful grant program. It has recently received the second highest rating on the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) in FY 2006. One recommendation from the PART review is to strengthen accountability by applying common measures. In response, VETS has begun applying common measures to this program, beginning with PY 2006. Another PART recommendation calls for conduct of a rigorous evaluation, to begin in 2007. In response, the Department has allocated FY 2007 funds for that purpose and VETS currently is developing a statement of work for a competitive award to a contractor during FY 2007. During FY 2006, HVRP had an entered employment rate of 72.8%, which exceeded the goal by over 4%.

**Veterans Workforce Investment Program (VWIP)** grants support efforts to ensure veterans' lifelong learning and skills development in programs designed to serve the most-at-risk veterans, especially those with service-connected disabilities, those with significant barriers to employment, and recently separated veterans. The goal is to provide an effective mix of interventions, including training, retraining, and support services, that lead to long term, higher wage and career potential jobs.

Services provided by grantees also include employment assistance and case management by DVOP and LVER staff. An important emphasis in this activity is on recently separated veterans in support of the Secretary's goal of a Competitive Workforce. Through the VWIP grants, VETS will continue to promote initiatives in high demand occupational areas, such as health care.

VETS requests \$7,351,000 in FY 2008 to serve 4,390 veterans. In FY 2006, VWIP had a 75% entered employment rate.

**HireVetsFirst Campaign** ([www.hirevetsfirst.gov](http://www.hirevetsfirst.gov)) began in support of the President's National Hire Veterans Committee established by the JVA. It has been a successful campaign, and the Web site has been averaging 35,000 unique visitors each month. So far, 46 Governors have signed proclamations indicating their support for hiring veterans by designating Hire Veterans First months. Last year, we hosted the first National Veterans Employment Summit and 17 veteran job fairs in partnership with media, veteran and military organizations. This year, over 120 veteran job fairs will be co-sponsored or co-branded by the Hire Vets First Campaign.

## **TRANSITION SERVICES**

Transition services include the Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshops, REALifelines program, and Operation War Fighter.

**Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Employment Workshops** are provided to transitioning service members at most military installations in the United States as well as in eight overseas locations. The TAP employment workshop is a Department of Labor-facilitated employment session which is conducted in partnership with the Department of Defense (DoD) and the VA. The two and one-half day employment workshops help service members prepare a plan for obtaining meaningful civilian employment when they leave the military. The workshop focuses on skills assessment, resume writing, job counseling and assistance, interviewing and networking skills, labor market information, and familiarization with America's workforce investment system.

Studies have shown that service members who participate in TAP employment workshops find their first civilian jobs three weeks earlier than veterans who do not participate in TAP. VETS estimates that about 65% of service members leaving active duty do attend a TAP workshop. We are working with DoD to increase participation. VETS continually updates the TAP workshop curriculum to reflect current hiring practices, and to include online content. Agency partners, such as the Employment and Training Administration, also provide feedback on TAP workshop content. For example, we are working to ensure that every TAP participant leaves the session with a draft resume, a practice interview session, and having visited their state job board.

VETS also works with National Guard and reserve component commanders in the states to provide TAP employment workshops for Reserve and National Guard members when they return from their deployments. In addition, electronic resources and tools to assist transitioning service members are being developed in collaboration with DoD

Attachments 1 and 2 to this statement summarize the TAP participation levels and workshops for the past several years.

**REALifelines** Jointly established in 2004 by the Veterans' Employment & Training Service and the Department's Office of Disability Employment Policy, REALifelines provides severely wounded and injured service members and their families with personal, one-on-one employment assistance while they are recovering at military medical treatment facilities. REALifelines staff operate at the Military Severely Injured Center (MSIC) and are forward positioned at Walter Reed Army Medical Center; National Naval Medical Center (Bethesda); Brooke Army Medical Center; Fort Carson, Colorado; Madigan Army Medical Center, Fort Lewis Washington; Naval Medical Center at Balboa; and Tripler Army Hospital, Hawaii. We are exploring additional forward positioning of REALifelines representatives located with the Army and the Marine Corps. Thus far, the REALifelines program has provided employment related assistance to over 2,700 severely injured service members. Over 150 service members have been employed through the program. We also posted useful information regarding the REALifelines program on the Department's Web site on "Employment Laws Assistance for Workers and Small Businesses" (elaws), which can be found at [www.dol.gov/elaws/realifelines.htm](http://www.dol.gov/elaws/realifelines.htm).

**Operation War Fighter (OWF)** is a DoD program that allows active duty wounded and injured individuals to be placed in temporary assignments with federal agencies in concert with an agency's needs and the individual's interests. DOL is proud to assist with the execution of this program.

Many of the severely wounded and injured have little or no civilian labor experience. OWF provides opportunities to these service members who may be in medical-hold pending a Physical Evaluation Board (PEB). Before a service member can enter into such an employment arrangement the treating physician must approve it. The work schedule has to revolve around the patients medical and rehabilitation needs. Over 140 Service members have been able to participate in OWF, with 50 currently assigned and 20 awaiting assignments

## **EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS**

Employment rights programs include the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, Veterans' Preference, and the Disabled Veterans Hiring Initiative.

**The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA)** protects the civilian job rights and benefits of veterans and members of the armed forces, including National Guard and Reserve members. USERRA also prohibits employer discrimination due to military obligations and provides reemployment rights to returning service members. VETS administers this law, conducts outreach and education, and investigates complaints by service members.

Since September 11, 2001, nearly 600,000 National Guard and Reserve members have been activated for military duty. During this same period, DOL/VETS has provided USERRA assistance to over 410,000 employers and service members. Since most complaints result from a misunderstanding of the USERRA obligations and rights, we have made the law easier to understand through clear regulations and an interactive USERRA Advisor that includes an online complaint filing capability. The Advisor is available any time at [www.dol.gov/elaws/userra.htm](http://www.dol.gov/elaws/userra.htm). We conduct continuous USERRA outreach and education. We aggressively investigate when employers do not comply with the law and we make every effort to bring them into compliance. We are constantly improving our USERRA investigative program.

After 9/11, USERRA complaints rose from approximately 900 per year, to over 1,500 per year. Complaints have leveled off at around 1500 per year. However, the rate of complaints, as compared with the last significant mobilization (First Gulf War) has been dramatically reduced. VETS works closely with DoD's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Reserve Affairs and the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve to ensure that service members are briefed on their USERRA rights before and after they are mobilized. Attachment 3 summarizes our USERRA caseload.

**Veterans' Preference** is authorized by the Veterans' Preference Act of 1944. The Veterans' Employment Opportunity Act (VEOA) of 1998 extended certain rights and remedies to recently separated veterans. VETS was given the responsibility to investigate complaints filed by veterans who believe their Veterans' Preference rights have been violated.

VETS is responsible for investigating and attempting to resolve Veterans' Preference complaints against Federal agencies filed under the VEOA. The VEOA provides that a veteran or other preference eligible person who believes that his or her rights under any law or regulation related to veterans' preference have been violated, may file a written complaint with VETS. We carry out our responsibility under the VEOA through the use of trained investigators in each of our state offices.

In addition to our investigative responsibility, VETS conducts an extensive compliance assistance program. This outreach is focused on educating potential veterans' preference eligibles and Federal agencies with regard to Veterans' Preference rights and responsibilities. VETS developed an interactive Veterans' Preference Advisor that allows Veterans' Preference claimants to officially submit using an electronic version of Forms 1010 (E-1010).

**The Disabled Veterans Hiring Initiative** was started in 2002 and is designed to educate federal agency Human Resource and hiring authorities on the benefits of hiring veterans and how they can be easily brought into federal jobs for which they qualify using special noncompetitive hiring authorities.

Two specific authorities have been available for many years – the Veterans Recruitment Authority (VRA) and the special authority for veterans rated 30% disabled or more by their military service branch or the VA.

The VRA allows a federal agency to appoint noncompetitively an eligible veteran to a position to which the veteran is qualified up to and including GS-11. Disabled veterans have preference over non-disabled veterans.

The 30% or more appointment authority is similar, but is available at any grade level including GS-15.

## **PROGRAM MANAGEMENT**

The VETS' federal staff provides program management and delivery of the previously discussed programs and services.

The field staff of approximately 75 serve as grant officer technical representatives for both the formula Jobs for Veterans State Grants and the competitive HVRP and VWIP

grants. Over 100 of the field staff are trained investigators who conducted investigations for USERRA and Veterans' Preference cases. In addition, field staff conduct extensive compliance assistance outreach services to employers and service members.

For Fiscal Year 2008, a total of \$33,282,000 is requested for this activity, an increase of about \$3.1 million over funding for this activity in FY 2007. This includes 244 FTEs, an increase of 4 FTE above the FY 2007 level.

**The National Veterans' Employment and Training Services Institute (NVTI)** was established to ensure a high level of proficiency and training for staff who provide veterans employment services.

NVTI provides training to federal and state government employment service providers in competency based training courses. The primary objective is to increase the service providers' productivity through increased knowledge. The NVTI effort ensures universality of training services for veterans and all direct client service providers.

The total request for FY 2008 is for \$1,949,000. The request addresses our requirement to train nearly 2,000 veteran service providers.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear today before the Subcommittee. This concludes my remarks, and I would be happy to respond to any questions.